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WINTER 2010

## SKI CUISINE

*The best mountain  
restaurants*



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## THE ULTRATRAVEL TOP 10 *Mountain restaurants*

IN THE BLUE RUN FROM SUNNEGGA TO FINDELN, IN the shadow of the flint-like Matterhorn, you had better not get distracted by the view – or ski too fast – or you will miss the first four mountain restaurants for which the area is famous. This may be no bad thing, since the fifth and final one is the Findlerhof, aka “Franz and Heidi’s”, a modest hut serving some of the finest mountain food in Zermatt. The only reason it is not in our top 10 is that there are already two contenders from this part of Switzerland – the best location in the world for “slopeside” fine dining.

“Getting there is part of the fun,” says Donald Scott, a gourmet ski guide with Mountain Exposure

(mountainexposure.com), the luxury chalet specialist that will escort you, on skis, to a different mountain restaurant every day without schussing past it by accident. “You arrive in this picture-book alpine hamlet of chalets, leave your skis by a small white chapel and walk down a narrow alleyway between the buildings,” he says. “People are seduced as soon as they set eyes on the place, with snow all around it. It’s a steepish downhill walk to the chalet, which is beautifully done out with cow bells, old skis and other memorabilia – pure alpine charm.”

Fresh oysters are always on the menu, harvested in France and delivered the same day to Zermatt, then transported up the mountain. “Because it is cold, they are fresher than they would be in London,” Scott reckons. Next he would recommend truffle ravioli, though his favourite is the quiche. The grand finale would be chocolate fondant (“melting on the inside, crisp on the outside”), while the wines would be Swiss whites from this, the Valais region, good Italian Sassicaia (Super Tuscan reds) or French merlots.

It is haute cuisine in a topographical sense, but homely and authentic rather than pretentious: what Scott judges to be “just below one Michelin star and certainly not The Fat Duck”. If that is what you want, there is no shortage of Michelin-

starred restaurants for skiers, but they tend to be in resorts rather than on a mountain. Courchevel boasts 12 Michelin stars shared by eight restaurants, from the old guard (Le Chabichou and Le Bateau Ivre, with two stars each) to the 2010 newcomers: Pierre Gagnaire pour les Airelles and Le 1947 (with two each) and Azimut, Il Vino d’Enrico Bernardo, La Table du Kilimandjaro and Le Farçon (all with one). Chamonix, Saas Fee and Val d’Isère have a scattering of stars, while San Cassiano resort in the Italian Dolomites has St Hubertus (with two stars), La Sirlola (one) and La Stia de Michil (also one).

If Ferran Adria folderol is not your thing, ski resorts are awash with less rarefied choices: 100 restaurants in Zermatt village alone, more in Aspen, Colorado. But is this what the well-heeled skier is looking for? “Most will be staying in a chalet where they get a gourmet dinner every night, or in a five-star hotel and eating there,” Scott says. “Not many people eat out every night in a ski resort, whereas everyone eats lunch on the slopes. I’d say there is far more interest in good lunchtime restaurants than there is in evening places.”

Like Ludlow in Shropshire, where acclaimed restaurants appear to spring up around some kind of gastronomic fault line, ski areas have the odd culinary eruption – as in the Findeln pentangle. Another cluster occurs in Val d’Isère, where five excellent, skiable restaurants are strung along the Verte run from Rocher de Bellevard to La Daille. At the top is Bellevard Altitude, and, on the way down, Les Marmottes, La Folie Douce, Le Trifollet and, at the bottom, Les Tufs.

In Alta Badia in the Italian Dolomites, 12 refuges have each been taught a dish by one of 12 top chefs, and eight participate in the Santa Croce Ski Tour, presenting dishes and wines from South Tyrol to gourmands arriving on skis. Finding such places requires a guide, and we have enlisted the help of the best in compiling this *Ultratravel* top 10.

Prices are per person, for three courses including wine.



That’s the spirit Guide Donald Scott at lunch in the Alps





## THE ULTRATRAVEL TOP 10

### Mountain restaurants



#### SWITZERLAND

##### CHEZ VRONY ZERMATT

On the same blue run as the Findlerhof (previous page), in another hamlet of timeless wooden chalets, Vrony's looks cow-bell traditional and something of a Swiss cliché until you step inside. The interior is more Hoxton than Heidi, with blocky modern furniture upholstered in black leather, cylindrical vases filled with pine cones and chandeliers made from old copper piping – the work of Heinz Julen, a local designer and brother of Vrony Cotting-Julen, who runs the place with her husband Max. Food purists, they keep their own cattle, and slaughter and butcher them to make the air-dried beef seen hanging from the rafters; in the basement, they make cheese. Start with a platter of both, drizzled in olive oil and dotted with red peppercorns, then choose from risotto with venison sausage, ravioli filled with mountain cheeses or pan-fried foie gras with apple, pear and berries. From £65 (00 41 27 967 2552, [chezvrony.ch](http://chezvrony.ch)).

##### ZUM SEE ZERMATT

Yes, it's Zermatt again – but this time on the main run down from Furi, in the Klein Matterhorn-Schwarzsee area. Again, this 17th-century chalet is next door to a chapel, and so authentic that the walls aren't straight, and the smaller upstairs dining room is heated by a log-fired stove as old as the building itself. Max and Greti Mennig's menu is as classical as the decor, featuring what



Donald Scott describes as "the best sweetbreads in the world", sautéed and served in a cream sauce with either noodles or rösti (a potato pancake). Max's Mediterranean fish soup – something you don't expect up a snowy mountain – is a gourmet treat as a starter or a main. If you're tired of strudel, opt for the *cremeschnitte* (cream slice) instead: a super-light

millefeuilles of puff pastry filled with calorific cream. From £65 (00 41 27 967 2045, [zumsee.ch](http://zumsee.ch)).

##### LA MARMITE ST MORITZ

A formal haute-cuisine restaurant is the last thing you expect inside the bright yellow brutalist structure that comprises the Corviglia ski station, high on a mountain top and served by a funicular railway. It is just one of six restaurants here

catering for every budget and taste. Chef Reto Mathis prepares well-presented dishes with an emphasis on exclusive ingredients, served at tables with white cloths and silver candelabra. Begin with lobster bisque, followed by tuna sashimi with black truffles and salmon caviar, or rack of red deer in a herb crust. For those with a sweet tooth, the menu delivers – but many head to La Dolce Vita, a buffet outlet specialising in desserts. New this season is De Fât Moonk lounge, where diners can enjoy a digestif and a cigar, or an aperitif. From £60, but the sky's the limit (00 41 81 833 6355, [mathisfood.ch](http://mathisfood.ch)).

#### ITALY

##### CHALET ETOILE CERVINIA

On a blue piste above Plan Maison, beneath the Rocce Nere chair lift, this rustic Italian is skiable from Zermatt and referred to simply as "Ulla's" (Ulla di Frassy being the Swede who runs it, along with her husband Cesare). The menu changes daily, but a recurring favourite is fish soup, a bowl of steamy, spicy broth brimming with mussels and langoustines. Mains might include pasta with mushrooms, spaghetti with lobster or clams, *bistecca* (beef steak, like a juicy Porterhouse) or slow-roasted leg of pork. The wine to drink is pinot noir from the Cave des Onze Communes in the Aosta Valley, leaving room for dessert, a perfect espresso with its crema intact, and a high-octane grappa, which is always on the house and comes with the bill. From £55 (00 39 0166 940220, no website).

#### FRANCE

##### LE CAP HORN COURCHEVEL 1850

This is a place for people-watching (celebrities, Muscovite millionaires) and status food (especially sushi), on a vast, sunny terrace overlooking the Altiport where Lear jets and helicopters land. The former mountain refuge has private lounges in which to escape the 300-seater main dining area with its nautical theme – echoed in the Yacht Club, a new members-only lounge upstairs. One popular option is seafood, ranging from Le Panier Rouge (Canadian lobster, crab, Dublin Bay prawns



#### Love it or hate it?

La Marmite is one of six restaurants in the yellow brutalist-style Corviglia ski station (left), serving up such delicacies as lentils with truffled pork knuckle (above). Max Mennig (top left), known for serving some of the best sweetbreads in the world at Zum See



THE ULTRATRAVEL TOP 10

# HAUTE CUISINE

Seafood platter, then soufflé?  
Serving up a Michelin-starred  
feast at Gornéglaz, with views  
over the Matterhorn



Skiers now expect their food to be as fine as their powder, their eating experiences as rarefied as mountain air. **Andrew Purvis** selects 10 lunch spots on top of the world